

III. CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Currently Amended) A method for prepayment of a service, comprising the steps of:

informing the user of the availability of a plurality of different services;

receiving from the user over a first communications link an indication of a desired service and a request for the desired service; and

receiving from the user an authentication key to indicate prepayment for the requested service;

verifying the validity of the authentication key; and

providing the requested service to the user over a second communications link;

~~receiving from the user an authentication key to indicate prepayment for the requested service;~~

~~verifying whether the authentication key is valid, and~~

~~providing the requested service if the authentication key is valid.~~

2. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the step of informing the user of the availability of a plurality of different services informs the user of the availability of a plurality of different contents, and correspondingly, the step of providing the requested service provides the requested content.

3. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein an authentication key is required each time a service is provided.

4. (Original) A method according to claim 1, the method further comprising:

the step of arranging each of the authentication keys to indicate a time period during which they are valid;

the step of verifying of validity of the authentication key comprises the step of comparing of the present date with time period during which the authentication key is valid; and

the step of rejecting expired authentication keys.

5. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises the following steps before receiving the request from the user;

generating the authentication key;

maintaining an authentication key validity database for verifying the validity of any of the generated authentication keys; and

delivering the authentication key to a user.

6. (Cancelled)

7. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 4, the method further comprising:

the step of scanning the data base of used authentication keys for detecting lapsed authentication keys for removing them from the data base of used authentication keys.

8. (Original) The method according to claim 5, wherein the method further comprises the step of modifying the validity database on providing the requested service so that the monetary value corresponding to the authentication key indicating the payment is reduced according to a price of the service requested by the user.

9. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the ~~the~~ authentication key is a printed user readable code.

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10. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises the step of concealing the authentication key with a non-reversibly removable concealing means.

11. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 9, wherein the method further comprises printing a group of authentication keys on a card.

12. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the first communications link is based on at least one of the following: a data network, a telephone network, a mobile telecommunications network, a local area network and a wide area network.

13. (Original) A method according to claim 1, the method further comprising the steps of:

allowing the user to test a service requested; and

receiving a final verification from the user before the user is provided with the service.

14. (Currently Amended) A system for prepayment of a service, comprising:

means for informing the user of the availability of a plurality of different services;

means for receiving from the user over a first communications link an indication of a desired service and a request for the desired service; and

means for receiving from the user an authentication key to indicate prepayment for the requested service;

means for verifying the validity of the authentication key;
and

means for providing the requested service to the user over a second communications link;

~~means for receiving from the user an authentication key to indicate prepayment for the requested service;~~

~~means for verifying whether the authentication key is valid,~~
~~and~~

~~means for providing the requested service if the authentication key is valid.~~

15. (Currently Amended) A computer program product for prepayment of a service, comprising:

computer readable program means for causing a computer to inform the user of the availability of a plurality of different services;

computer readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user over a first a first communications link an indication of a desired service and a request for the desired service; and

computer readable program means for receiving from the user an authentication key to indicate prepayment for the requested service;

computer readable program means for verifying the validity of the authentication key; and

computer readable program means for causing a computer to provide the requested service to the user over a second communications link;

~~computer readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user an authentication key to indicate prepayment for the requested service;~~

~~computer readable program means for causing a computer to verify whether the authentication key is valid; and~~

~~computer readable program means for causing a computer to provide the requested service if the authentication key is valid.~~